



An insider's view of the Chelsea Flower Show

Archer writer Ruth Anders works for the Royal Horticultural Society every year at the Chelsea Flower Show. Here she reveals some of the secrets of the show gardens.

Ice-cream, champagne, the royal visit, gardens great and small, celebrities, thronging crowds, Monty Don on TV and floral extravaganzas in the Great Pavilion: these are what typify the Chelsea Flower Show for many. Insiders see the event differently.

Plans for each event begin years in advance as designers and sponsors are brought together. Trees and other plants are sourced from far-flung nurseries, often overseas. Selection panels meet and choose the exhibits most likely to deliver spectacular displays from the traditional to the more adventurous. Judging is rigorous, medal cards are printed overnight and tears of joy or disappointment are shed as the awards are dis-

tributed early next morning.

This year's focus was on sustainability and the link between plants and mental wellbeing. The on-site build takes three weeks, yet the show gardens appear to have been in place for years. Fifteen-hour shifts are the norm in the days before opening, but horticultural excitement and commitment overcome the fatigue.

Changes over the years

The first show opened in the grounds of Christopher Wren's Royal Hospital in 1913. My first time was in 1993 and I can see significant changes since then.

The large show gardens are fewer, and there are more smaller plots designed to inspire urban home dwellers. Ranelagh Gardens, once only hosting the band-

stand and beer stalls, is now filled with imaginative tradestands and a magical woodland area of artisan gardens and retreats.

Night encounter

Fortunate to admire the exhibits out of hours, I can walk through the showground at dawn with no one but the blackbirds and the litter pickers, and wander through the Great Pavilion late at night, the air heavy with the fragrance of roses and jasmine.

Years ago, I was distributing medal cards at a chilly 2am, alone with the nursery displays, when I came face to face with a handsome fox, each of us mesmerised by the other before he trotted off. Chelsea is full of surprises, and its sights and scents lift the spirits, even those of the most exhausted participant.



A rose amongst the roses: Ruth finds time to read *The Archer* at the show.

Over the fence

Caroline and David Broome will be welcoming visitors again on the last Sunday of this month in support of the National Garden Scheme. The couple have packed their garden in East Finchley with unusual perennials and shrubs, whimsical ornamentals and wacky new water features.



Potted up: One corner of Caroline and David's garden in Church Lane.

There will be home-made cakes (some gluten free), a selection of locally propagated plants for sale, a raffle and a children's treasure hunt.

Last year the National Garden Scheme raised more than £3 million countrywide for charities, including Macmillan Cancer Support and Marie Curie.

You can visit Caroline and David's garden at 79 Church Lane, N2, from 2pm to 6pm on Sunday 29 July. Entrance is £4 per person, free for

children. Find more details at: www.ngs.org.uk/find-a-garden/garden/21824/

There's another open garden in Muswell Hill on Sunday 22 and Sunday 29 July when Susan Bennett and Earl Hyde welcome visitors to their home in 1960s cul-de-sac St Regis Close, off Alexandra Park Road, N10. Their garden will be open on both days from 2pm to 6.30pm with teas and a plant sale. Admission £4, children free.

Teenager charged with phone robberies

By Janet Maitland
A 14-year-old boy has been arrested and charged with seven counts of robbery while riding pillion on a moped.

It is alleged that at least seven people had their mobile phones snatched on Thursday 7 June between 1.15pm and 2.15pm in Muswell Hill, Crouch End and Hornsey.

The boy, who is from Tottenham, was taken into custody where 13 mobiles were allegedly found in his possession. He appeared at Highbury Magistrates Court on 9 June and pleaded not guilty to all the charges. A date for a pre-trial hearing will be set soon.

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Stories from 80 years of a public library service

By Erini Rodis

Help is needed as East Finchley Library turns 80 this October. A group of local enthusiasts has decided to organise a local storybuilding project to celebrate our Grade II landmark building and its milestone birthday.

Local historian Emily Candler, who worked on the Martin School Centenary project in 2013, say they want to delve into the story of the library building on the High Road and its role in the local community over the past eight decades.

"The aim is to give local people a chance to explore archives, create an exhibition, tell their stories, build skills and take part in a day of events in October," said Emily. "This story of a local library rooted in the community is commonplace but untold; as libraries' future is a topical debate, it's a story that needs to be told."

"We'd like to use a day of events as a focus both for sharing what local people already know about the library's story, and recording the people's memories of the building. We also hope to do some art, photography, and architectural talks."

Getting involved

The organisers would welcome help from any individu-

als, local trusts or community groups who would like to get involved in the project, be it doing some research, writing up stories, helping make a film or exhibition, or running events or digital and print communications.

To join in or to share your own memories of the library in East Finchley, email: Story-BuildingN2@gmail.com



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